

## NORTHERN NIGERIAN WOMEN AND PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT: IMPEDIMENTS AND SOLUTIONS

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the participation of northern Nigerian women in trade union movement. Certainly, the major problems affecting the participation of northern Nigerian women in the trade union activities is the cultural stereotype and unequal access to education that subjugated women in the northern part of the country to domestic assignment. These factors have continually posed a serious threat or set back to women participation and representation in the labour activities. The article examines the obstacles or barriers to women participation in trade unionism of the northern region. The method used in gaining the appropriate data is the secondary source of data collection. This enabled the researcher to obtain appropriate and suitable data on the topic under study. To support the study Liberal feminist theory was used, the postulation of the theory centered on gender gap as man-made phenomenon not naturally created. The accessible and acquired data discloses that cultural stereotype, unequal access to education and religion factors

have negatively contributed to women participation in trade union movement of the northern part of the nation. Thus, the research recommends that the government should provide the women with free education and different kinds of skills acquisition programmes to empower them to participate in the trade union movement in the northern region. Religion leaders and parents should enlighten the women the important of their participation from Islamic and parental point of view. The government and the stakeholders as a matter of urgent should take a positive measure on the gender discrimination in the society in line with the 35% Geneva affirmative action on gender equality.

**Keywords:**Nigeria,Northern, Participation, Trade Union and Women.

## 1. Introduction

The general development of any nation rest on the proper use of its human resources, both (genders inclusive). In northern Nigeria women comprise approximately half of the whole population. But the position of women is inferior than that of men in every domain. Women are branded with domestic responsibilities while politics and other social activities are a male-dominated activity that is stereotypically masculine in outlook.

Nigeria is one of the largest nation in Africa blessed with human and material resources, the current population of country in totality is 196,651,048 out of this the male population is 99,579,686 which is (50.6%) and the female population is 97,071,362 which is 49.4% respectively (UNDESA, 2018). It is observed that in Nigerian context, the numerical strength of the women has been measured to be of great importance that are necessary for the growth of the nation economy and good governance that would enhance social and political development. Therefore, it is expected to transform the nation into a better status. Thus, over the years, researchers have stressed on the significance of empowering women for National progress. But one vital component (women education) for attaining this is missing.

The above assertion coincided with the the opinion of Agbalajobi (2010), that, women in Nigerian institute are about half of the population of the nation and are recognized to play vibrant roles as mother, producer, time manager, community organizer and social and political activist. In view of this it is known that women are playing a great role in the society been the managers and the community organizers as well. Nonetheless, in spite of the major roles they perform and their large population, the society has not given appreciation to these and to the fact that they are segregated against. This is because of some cultural stereotype, abuse of religion, traditional practices and patriarchal nature of the society.

According to (Whitaker, 1970), Northern Nigeria has a land mass of about 300, 000 square miles and 720 miles wide in addition to larger populations and deposits natural resources. The area was also earlier being referred to as Central Sudan, Northern Protectorate of Nigeria, Northern Province and Northern Region It currently comprises of 19 out of 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and also has 413 out of the 768 Local Government Areas in the Federation of Nigeria - Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Benue, Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara (Mohammed, 2018).

However, Paden (1986), observed that, the Northern region is heterogeneous in nature and comprised of the far North, the controversial Middle Belt, the riverine states, the North Central, and other divisions as determined geo-political and other circumstances.

Based on the above, it is noted that, the Northern Region of Nigeria is the largest of all the three geographical zones in size, human and material resources. It is the most influential and prominent region in Nigeria's political affairs during the pre and post independence periods. These have however, been waning overtime and it is so intense that the region is today despised, manipulated and politically relegated to the background of national political-economy. The Northern region is in dilemma as regards countless problems it is facing. Women in the northern region are also encountering gender problem in the trade union movement, they are subjugated to domestic responsibilities because of culture, religion and patriarchy nature of the region (Asiyanbola, 2005, Adeyemi, Ojo, Aina, & Olanipekun, 2006 and Aina, 1998).

Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) is an umbrella organization for trade unions in Nigeria. It was founded in 1978 following a merger of four different organizations: Nigeria Trade Union Congress (NTUC), Labour Unity Front (LUF), United Labour Congress (ULC) and Nigeria Workers Council (NWC). NLC has 42 affiliated industrial unions. Its founding President was Wahab Goodluck (Okechukwu, 2016). The unions were modernised into 43 industrial unions under the leadership of comrade Ayuba Wabba. A trade union is an association based on membership of workers in various occupation, trade and professions whose main attention is the representation of its followers at the place of work and in the society at large. It mostly seeks to advance its interest through the process of rule-making and collective bargaining (Charles, 2014). Trade unions are formed to protect the right and interest of its members through the principle of negotiation and bargaining, as stated in the union constitution.

Study by Charles (2014), it is noted that, at national level the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has approved resolutions and adopted some policies towards females employees which are liberal in terms of women's fairness within the trade union movement. These changes are the result of many years of struggle by the women within the labour movement, and as such there are significant improvement in participation of women in the labour unionism, however, the resolutions are not essentially interpreted into reality.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

In many years back, there was a consensus on gender equality and women participation in trade union movement of Nigeria. Some maintain that, women are weaker sex compare to men in every capacity, as such they are subjugated to domestic affairs and placed in the inferior positions in the trade union movement and society at large. Given this the study aim to investigate the issues or factors that are responsible for gender inequality among the genders in the trade union movement of northern region of Nigeria. Looking at women as weaker individuals, these are social constructs owed to social value, norms and beliefs, which have deserted the roles and eloquent contribution of women and place them in inferior position to men in the trade union movement of the northern region. The gender discrimination in the trade unionism began right from the colonial system of administration that gave much power to men at the expense of the women, this problem of gender inequality continued up to this present time.

### *1.2 Objectives of the Study*

1. The main objectives of this article are to examine the impediment factors to women participation in trade union movement of the northern region.
2. To investigate the effect of the impediment factors on women participation in trade union movement.

3. To proffer solution to the identified impediment factors to women participation in trade union movement of the northern regions.

### *1.3 Theoretical Framework*

There are several theories that discuss on gender related issues, but for the purpose of this study the researcher used liberal feminist theory to explain and support the study.

Liberal feminist theory was advocated by Wollstonecraft in 1800 and the postulation of the theory positioned on gender gap as man-made phenomenon. The uniqueness of the theory is forecast on gender parity. The theory believes that gender discriminations are not naturally or biologically formed but are man-made. Liberal feminism therefore, desire for gender impartiality among men and women in all the societies, the theory believes that all human beings are created equal, so their action and inactions should be manage equally. The theory also calls for the re-organization all the organizations. Liberal feminists have worked through the legislative change to ensure gender equality in all sectors including education and excluded job discernment and allocation of political posts, the theory fought sexual intensification in all the society, legally defined as job discrimination pay equity (equal pay for equal work) equal duty for the actions of family life (Sha, 2007).

The theory stresses that, women should be authorized in all the societal activities, should not be dominated to household tasks only, and should not be used as a basis of income by the industries. The theory also attempts to eliminate chauvinism and conventional view of women and men, and added that both men and women are borne equally, so equal judgement should be given to all genders regardless of class, gender, ethnicity race or class (Sha, 2007).

### *1.4 Methodology*

This study is fundamentally based on the review of relevant literature that were obtained from secondary sources these comprises; journals, newspapers, research works, published books, reports, and articles that dealt with gender issues Some relevant materials were also retrieved through internet browsing.

## **2. Literature Review/Conceptualisation**

Participation is a development approach, which identifies the necessity to take in the deprived groups of the people in the plan and policy implementation regarding their welfare. The consolidation of women's involvement in all spheres of life has become a main problem in the development discourse. Socio-economic development cannot be fully attained without the active participation of women at all level of the decision-making and policy implementation in an organization. Many scholars define 'Participation' in various ways based on their understanding and perception of the term. Khan (1993), recognized four main types of participation, which are different but interconnected. These comprise: Participation in decision making and detecting problems formulating alternative planning activities, participation in allocating resources. Participation in implementation and carrying out activities, participation in managing and operating programs.

The concept of gender disparity can be professed from social procedures whereby people in the society are not treated equally under equal situation, because of gender inequality in the society, in this situation, those becomes victim or susceptible is determined by the sociological arrangement in the society. Nevertheless, the level of susceptibility among women is higher than the males' counterpart (UNDP, 2015).

It is accepted that union survival depends on widening trade unions' traditional recruitment areas to include the service sector generally and specifically to rise the number of women in trade

unions. At the same time, trade unions have understood that women are under-represented in union assemblies and numerous steps have been taken to address this gender imbalance through for instance, reserved seats and proportionality. Nevertheless such possibly transformative changes, union culture has been characterised as imperishably patriarchal (Kirton & Healy, 1999).

### **3. Impediment to Women Participation in Trade Union Movement of the Northern Nigeria**

Northern Nigeria historically was a region encompassed Hausa kingdoms, From 1804–1808, Islamic scholar Usman dan Fodio led a successful Fulani jihad against the Hausa kingdoms or city-states in today's Northern Nigeria. This jihad introduced the revolution afterwards of the poleis into Islamic civilizations (Vaughan O. and Suraiya Z. B., 2014).

In line with the above assertion, it is observed that, right from ancient time, Nigerian society has been a patriarchal in nature (Aina, 1998). Patriarchy system has been a main feature of the Nigerian society. This is because it is structured on a set of social relations with material base which allows the male to lead women. Study by (Aina, 1998; Kramarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993), exposed and they all believe that, Patriarchy is a system of social stratification and difference on the basis of gender, which offers material advantages to men over women while at the same time placing severe restrictions on the activities and roles of women.

Traditionally, in the northern Nigeria the men do not partake in domestic labor as well as child rearing, such responsibilities are considered to be limited to women. Males are classified as having the following features: asset, vigour, powerful courage, self-confidence and the ability to meet the outside world i.e. animal and human burglars head on and dealt with it efficiently. These attributes were mirrored in the work that men involved in (Asiyanbola, 2005).

Northern Muslims and Northern Christians confusing the meaning of gender and group, Although these developments and their individual descriptions are vulnerable to numerous forms of cultural essentialisms and reifications of traditions, they also involve discourses of power in important ways as an important issues. these discourses of cultural confirmation and confrontation to patriarchy are an influential medium for the justification of power among men and women in Nigeria (Vaughan O. and Suraiya Z. B., 2014).

The cultural, religion and the patriarchal nature of the northern region affects both the Muslims and the Christians, this is because the Christians women too are not actively participating in the trade union movement, because of the influence of the patriarchy and culture that is controlling the activities of both genders in the region.

From religious perception, especially Islam and Christianity, the positions and roles of women are related with some restrictions. This is manifested by the women position in both Islam and Christianity on one hand and Western Civilizations on the other hand. For instance, many Christians followers and general members of the Anglican Church of England consider the appointment of women as Bishops in the Church against Biblical injunctions (Nigerian wing inclusive) while some other but few see it as appropriate and acceptable in Christianity (Mohammed I. S. and Jamal A. A., 2013).

Religion and some other socio-cultural issues account for some of the plan used to reject women from labour unionism. In the developing countries, women are not allowed to take part in any public matters like trade union movement. The belief is that there are some cultures that women

cannot lead but to be led and that it is taboo for women to lead men. The study added that, African culture has distinct roles for women and men. Women parts are in the household and family (private sphere) while that of men is the public this has in various ways affect the nation economic development (M. A. Ali, 2016).

The truth of the women of northern Nigeria is that they remain vulnerably relegated group that are yet to enjoy fairness in position and access to social services and material resources with their men counterparts (Okpe, 2005; Salaam, 2003). However, in the northern part of Nigeria women are at the “lowest stage of literacy and poverty” and most of them are living in rural areas where social amenities are not adequately provided in the area. Women in the northern part of the nation are affected by several factors ranging from cultural, religion, patriarchal nature of the region, heterogeneity unequal access to education domestic assignment, environmental and family factors.

This coincided with the view of Agbalajobi (2010), in his study who explained that, inadequate knowledge of written and unwritten rules denied women’s political rights and participation in politics. In line with the assertion it is noted that women in northern Nigerian are not adequately educated because of patriarchal nature of the area and cultural obstacles that control the movement and interaction of the womenfolk.

In a similar opinion Khameini (2012), sustained that, “the Islamic view of women is conflicting the Western view of women. The Western view of women is an insulting view. They call it freedom, but it is not in fact freedom”. Study by Mohammed I. S. and Jamal A. A. (2013), revealed that, in Muslims world and specifically (Muslim, Arab States), women rarely occupy political and key public or private positions, where such are found, they are slow due to influence of Arab culture and Islamic religion which confine women mostly to their parents, matrimonial homes and other essential works. This stand on women in most parts of Arabia is backed by Islamic religious commands in both the Holy Qur’an and the Prophet (SAW) traditions. The Holy Qur’an (Chapter 4:34) provides for mankind as cited in Mohammed I. S. and Jamal A. A. (2013). that:

*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard. (e.g. their chastity, their husband’s property)...*

According to (Aina, 1998; Kramarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993), they all noted that, patriarchy Firstly used to define the power of the father as head of the family, the word ‘patriarchy’ has been used in post 1960s feminism refer to the orderly group of men authority and women relegation. The term has been described as a system of male authority over women through its political, social, and economic organizations.

Nigerian society, like most African nations is patriarchal in outlook, with unfit gender relations which subjugate women in a inferior position. Though, African researchers have opposed and still do, that it was not always that way, but that it became patriarchal because introduction of external factors such as religions of Islam and Christianity, colonialism, education among others. They observed that, most of African society, as well as Nigeria, was matriarchal in structure (Dogo, 2014).

The study of Eyinade A (2010), identified numerous impediments which she believes affects women participation in the politics. These comprises cultural values: social conventions, values and mores which maintain the stereotype of women as kitchen residents outside their marital homes, similarly, religion as an achieve of cultural mores in strengthening the barriers that stop the females from contributing politically, women's observed politics as a dirty game, because they believe the demands of politics is time overwhelming, violence and intimidations in political events, money and poverty.

In a similar vein study by Agbalajobi (2010), showcase that, in many countries of the world including Africa the segregation of females in politics is as a result of many factors or reasons; these include but not limited to financial, cultural, traditional and political among others. In line with these factors it is understood that the northern Nigerian women are been sideline to homebased activities.

Another impediment to women participation in trade union movement in the northern region was exposed by Jane L . Parpart (1986), that, gender parity and patriarchal norms have joint to deny women political right. However, even where females are officially equal to males, male's prevalence continues be presumed. Once females challenge this fact, they abruptly scolded. For instance, considering the attack by President of Kenya Moi, who punished the privileged females for "confusing rural women by saying females should be same with the males." He specified that "to be equal with men is to imply that God had stumbled after all when he made men the head of the family, and placed women to the subordinate position at the households.

Northern Nigeria is deeply patriarchal society in nature, with many major culture and tribe, not just supporting, but spreading exciting male dominance and privilege over women. Traditional societies here are unrepentant on patriarchy system because the man is undisputable head of the household and enjoys the right and privilege of having superior value the woman, regardless of intelligence, age, income or any other future (Buchi Onyegbule, 2017).

Similarly, Adefolaju (2017), is of the same opinion that, Patriarchy, is a structure of social divisions based on gender, it has dominated many civilizations and delivers material benefits to males to the disadvantage of females on whose route is restricted and positioned. Therefore, Men's dominion over women is the basis of gender relations in the societies where management position is usually assigned to male while females are entertained to be certain that one day, they will be given out for marriage. He however, emphasized that, even when women express the interest and capacity to take part in and contribute to the family financial growth, they are reserved by numerous reasons these comprises capital, access to land and control over their own capitals. In view of this it is observed that females' effort in the home base does not attract any income, as it is not extremely appreciated.

In line with this Members of the Parliament unveiled that, "females were destined to serve the males. And they finally emphasized that, women can never be equal to men. Similar opinions have been voiced in Zambia, in 1982, where the Prime Minister Mundi guided a new spouse that "females graduates should respect themselves as housewives and mothers at home and specialists only at places of work while the husband is the leader of the household (Jane L . Parpart, 1986)."

In view of this it is noted that, women in the northern region are subjugated to domestic assignment that was planned to them by the societal culture, traditions and religion. Based on this, study by Losindilo, Mussa, Akarro, & Lecturer (2010), disclosed that women are the mostly affected by undesirable effects of economic social programmes. This is because customary laws have given men more authority and control over material resources, decision-making processes

and policy implementation. Therefore, making the society undemocratic and patriarchal in outlook. This has led to broad divergent access to social services and decision-making processes, that is the major reason why women's empowerment and participation in trade union movement and political status remain very low compare to the men counterpart in the region.

#### **4. Solutions to Women Impediment in Trade Union Movement**

The paper explained vividly on the impediment to women participation in trade union movement, it also proffers solution to the identified problem. One of important solution is women empowerment through education. In view of this, study by Akinsanya (2011), it is observed that, the main aims of Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) is to improve the level of women education, gender fairness, and women empowerment. It noted that, education and training are major contributors to the development of national economy by educating the capacities of the workforce.

Study by Omole MAL (1995), revealed that, each of the recognized shareholders in the socio-economic domain of the country sees and recognizes labour education in a different way. The observation of government and proprietors expresses employees' education as a means to advance worker knowledge and skills to be more industrious and productive in discharged of their work. this would also help rise companies control over the workforces.

To encourages women of the northern region to actively participate in trade union movement, study by M. A. Ali (2016), suggested that, all union meeting or gathering should hold in the day light not in the night hours. In addition to that, he added that all the union gathering should be in the union offices not in any residential houses, hotels or hidden venue. This will encourage and allow them to participate comfortably in the union activities or meetings. But holding meetings in hotel or residential house will discourage women, and many spouses will not allow their wives to attain.

To overcome the aforementioned impediment, parents and religious leaders should embark on enlightening their wives and daughters on the importance of women in nation building, by extension they can as well encourage them to take part in unions activities, because women too have some vital roles to perform in the unions activities.

In the opinion of Agbalajobi (2010), to overwhelmed the impediment of women marginalization in the trade union movement in the northern Nigeria there is need for quotas and proportionate women representation in the union leadership this would give them sense of belonging and encouragement in the system. However, the quota system for proper women representation is mostly seen as a positive action of laws allocating quotas for women to assist in the elevating gender equality in public life. In line with this Quota system is considered as a genuine means of safeguarding this end.

Another solution to participation of the northern women in trade union movement is disclosed in the work of Agbalajobi (2010), which explained that, there are some basic agencies and programmes by the United Nations (UN) these agencies and programmes are dedicated in inspiring the position of womenfolk in political activities. For example, there was a women conference which held in Beijing, China in 1995, with the theme "Equality Development and Peace Contriving Strategies" to active freedom and empowerment of women with its general goal at terminating those practices and values that marginalized women. taking the necessary steps to improve the numeral of women folk representation in governmental bodies everywhere in the world. In view of this it is believe that, the development of women's in a social, financial and political position, is essential for the attainment of both a transparency and accountability in government; and guaranteeing gender fairness in the nation at large.



For operative participation of women in the Nigerian labour movement, there must be a strategies and policies that would encourage women positively to participate actively in the labour related matters. Such policies and strategies must necessarily integrate gender related matters or perspectives and equality issues in areas like negotiation and bargaining. So also the educational matters, union activities, and information. Similarly, study by Fapohuda (2004), exposed that the approach of a minimum of 30% female participation at all levels of union activities must be set and considered (as mentioned in both the ILO and the united nations conferences) female quotas at whatsoever levels need to be considered in the labour union electoral procedures, so as to encourage women to actively partake in the activities of the union.

Considering the above mentioned solutions to the impediment of women participation in the trade union movement, the study emphasized that if all the outlined solution are to be appropriately implemented it will enhance the level of women participation in the trade unionism of the northern region.

### **5. Recommendations**

The level of women's participation and representation in trade unionism on decision-making and policy implementation figures should be improved in order to enable them to represent the interest of their fellow women in the union activities at both level.

Government should make sure that women in both rural and urban centers have equal access to education precisely tertiary education, this is because education is the key to women's empowerment and development in Nigeria. To support this There is a need for the Government to conduct civic education on an on-going basis link with, the support of NGOs that are engaged in these activities.

Societal problems such as culture and tradition, religion and other hateful opinions should be smashed, women should not be tame, they have to gain same right to work and associated welfares as men. They should also have equal access to free and functional educational system and health care services, electoral progression and competition must not be a reserve for the men only.

It is found that, poverty is one of the major impediment to women participation in trade unionism in the northern region to solve this problem. Government should provide financial backing schemes for both girls and women in working organizations. The policy makers should design adult education programmes to encourage and promote the enrolment and attendance of women.

To encourage women participation in trade union movement there is need for proper awareness of their membership and unionist legal rights and to claim them.

Most of the women are shy of trade unionism because of the environment. To encourage them to take part in the labour movement there is need for an enabling environment that would allow women to participate actively and to involve in decision making process in a supportable and operative way free from any form of intimidation, harassments and ferocity.

The study further suggested that, to encourage women participation in trade union movement religion leaders should enlighten the women the important of their participation from Islamic point of view, and explain to them that, their participation in the trade unionism matters a lot. They believe women are the one to represent women because they know much about their problems and matters related to them.

The government and the stakeholders as a matter of urgent should take a positive measure on the gender discrimination in the society by implementing the 35% Geneva affirmative action on gender equality.

Democracy in anyplace in the world is the right and privilege of the individuals. This is because sovereignty they say, fit in to the publics (women inclusive). It is then imperative that the act of supremacy should be expanded to capture the attention and interest of females through passable women representation.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Participation of Nigerian northern women in trade union movement is an important issue of great concern, this is because women in the northern Nigeria are been placed at the backyard politically in the trade unionism for years. Because of cultural stereotype and patriarchal nature of the region that subjugated women to household responsibilities. These has provoked women under-participation in the trade union activities. Though, the aim of most of them is to participate in politics of trade unionism essentially to support their womenfolk, because they believe is their practical duty to depend and protect the right and interest of their female's members. But culture and tradition, religion and some societal norms has designed them a role to play in the home based. Though, there is need for women participation in the trade union movement of the northern region, to defend the right and interest of fellow women. To accomplish this all cultural stereotype and patriarchal system that subjugated women to domestic responsibilities should be reversed in favour of the women.

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